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SUBJECT: Guangdong Illegal Blood Trading Ring Uncovered

(U) This document is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (U) Summary: Since 1998, when Guangzhou first officially permitted citizens to donate blood, authorities have attempted to combat the illegal trade of blood supplies amid fears of disease transmission, especially HIV/AIDS. Recently, authorities have identified a string of cases in which Guangzhou Blood Center employees have aided patients in obtaining blood platelets from illegal trading rings for a fee. The trade can be highly profitable because platelet supplies are so low. Local law enforcement and health authorities have created a joint task force to further investigate the illegal operations, and have made several arrests in the process. End summary.

Corruption in Local Blood Banks

¶2. (SBU) The regulation of blood centers remains an ongoing challenge in south China. In 2007 alone, local authorities reportedly shut down 4,915 blood banks amid allegations of faulty operations, including violations of established blood collecting regulations. Even more difficult to monitor is illegal blood trade operations that often involve blood center personnel. Despite continued campaigns prohibiting blood trading, including a 2005 campaign launched by the national Ministry of Health, illegal operations have once again surfaced in Guangdong. Authorities have uncovered cases of dealers securing blood platelets from municipal blood centers, and selling the supply to ill patients in need of platelet transfusions.

¶3. (SBU) Most recently, a security guard supervisor at the Guangzhou Blood Center, one of many employees allegedly working as middlemen in sales transactions. The mother of a leukemia patient turned him in after he offered to arrange a transfusion for her daughter. The patient had been unable to obtain a transfusion due to a shortage of platelets at the center. Out of desperation, her mother went to the center herself, only to be approached by the security guard who assured her that he could successfully find a donor in exchange for 1,000 yuan (USD 140) per unit of platelets.

¶4. (SBU) According to media reports, blood trade middlemen, like the security guard supervisor, are able to profit from these deals, usually earning RMB 1000 - 1200 (USD 143-170) per transaction. However, most of the revenue is collected by the ringleaders, who can earn estimated hundreds of thousands up to RMB 1 million per year (about USD 143,000). Often the deals involve additional actors,

such as the informer, the organizer, and the blood seller, who each take a cut. If the blood type is rare, the illegal ring profits even more.

Purchasing Platelets: illegal solutions for low supply

15. (U) Obtaining a platelet transfusion which aids in the body's natural blood clotting process, is not easy in Guangdong due primarily to low supply levels. In 2007, approximately 300,000 people donated whole blood, raising the Guangzhou Blood Center's supply to approximately 59 tons. Although this supply is nearly adequate to meet demand, the amount of blood platelets donated is not. Transfusion patients in Guangzhou need about 30,000 units of platelets annually, but the city has been unable to meet this goal.

16. (SBU) The shortage of platelets is caused both by a lack of public awareness and the logistics of the donating procedure. In order to donate platelets, a donor must first undergo a comprehensive physical exam. In the procedure itself platelets are subtracted from the donated blood, and the rest of the blood is returned to the donor's body. Also, in the case of general blood donations, supplies have a shelf-life of two weeks; platelets can only be used up to five days after the initial donation. To address these problems, Fu Yongshui, Director of the Guangzhou Blood Center, told reporters that the Center plans to establish an additional 14 blood platelet donation locations.

Catching the Criminals

17. (SBU) Fu also said that each year the Guangzhou Blood Center

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purges security and cleaning staff to combat corruption, and requires platelet donors to supply fingerprints to ensure that donations are made at least four weeks apart. In some cases, people donate only to profit from the illegal trade. According to a media report, one man gave blood 16 times over a twelve-month period, with the expectation that he would profit from a potential customer. In addition, local police authorities and the Guangdong Provincial Health Department have created a joint task force that is currently investigating the extent of the blood trade and the players involved. Thus far, several culprits, both employees of the blood center and members of the trading rings, have been identified and subsequently arrested.

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